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AUTHOR Duke, Charles R.
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ABSTRACT

Music education is uniquely suited to reinforce several basic skills that are part of the overall reading and writing processes of students. These skills include freedom of expression and the fluency of ideas, identifying a composer's purpose and message, and reasoning and comprehension. Musicians should develop the habit of using journals for capturing responses to music heard and first attempts at composing, as well as for including other written material about music. A good exercise once or twice in a course is to have students review their journal entries and write a longer entry in which they either try to trace some theme that runs through their material or chart their progress and explain what they have discovered about themselves as listeners as well as musicians. A directed reading activity is one technique, for introducing reading material, that will result in improved student attitudes and comprehension. Students do a prereading that sets a purpose for the reading, a prompted reading to foster reader response, and a postreading that provides reinforcement of comprehension. Finally, students can show their level of understanding by applying what they have learned in a musical activity. (SRT)

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Charles R. Duke
Department of Secondary Education
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322-2815

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Integrating Reading, Writing, and Thinking Skills into the Music Class

Though many music teachers initially may argue otherwise, reading, writing, and thinking skills can be taught through music. At times music teachers may be caught up in the "hand out the music, teach it, play it" syndrome, but the integration of reading and writing into a music program can augment the learning process itself and do much to produce musicians who have a greater appreciation and understanding of their work.

Music teachers are not expected to become either reading or writing teachers during this integration process. Nevertheless, music is uniquely suited to reinforce several basic skills which are a part of the reading and writing processes of students. These skills include freedom of expression and the fluency of ideas; identifying a composer's purpose and message; and reasoning and comprehension.

Let's begin with freedom of expression and fluency. Students in music, like students in any field, need to be encouraged to express their feelings and ideas, to try out interpretations without fear of ridicule, and to get accustomed to reflecting about their responses--in this case, to music. Perhaps we forget too often that students at the secondary level need "listening time" as well as practice time. But how do we provide for this? In the reading and writing processes, building of anticipation and discovering what we know and don't know come under the heading of pre-reading or pre-writing. The same principle can be applied to the teaching of music. For example, time might well be spent prior to beginning work on a new piece or introducing a new composer to help students anticipate what

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they will be working on and to identify what knowledge they may already possess.

Here's how this might work when introducing a unit on modern music or composers. We might use George Antheil's "Ballet Mechanique" as a basis for our lesson, a particularly good selection since few students will have heard it. Its unconventional instruments like the woodblock, large and small airplane propellers, and large and small electric bells juxtaposed against conventional instruments like drums, pianos and xylophones will provide both points of recognition and points of puzzlement. Prepare the students by telling them that you will be playing for them a new piece that will provide them with important clues as to the music they will be studying next. Suggest that students think about their responses to each of the questions below as they listen:

1. Of what places, scenes, people or feelings does the music remind me?
2. What sounds are familiar in this music?
3. What surprises me in this music?

Play about five minutes of the piece; then stop and ask students to respond in writing to the above questions, not worrying about proper sentence structure or spelling--just write as quickly and as fully as possible. Teachers should model the behavior by writing as well. When pencils begin to slow, take a few minutes and ask students to share responses; you might choose to do this by asking students to share with a partner or if the class is comfortable with each other, suggest that they share as a class. To add variety to the response, you might want to move back and forth among the three questions until everyone has had an opportunity to answer at least once.

Now ask students to think about what they have heard and to predict what they will hear in the next section you are going to play. List some of these predictions on the chalkboard. Then play another 3-4 minute excerpt. Ask students to write again, this time focusing on comparing or contrasting what they thought they might hear with what they actually heard. Again, discuss, encouraging students to identify why they anticipated as they did and what adjustments, if any, they had to make to what they heard. Students usually will be ready at this time to move to a discussion of the apparent characteristics of the music they are hearing; from this point, a teacher can easily move to a more in-depth discussion of the music to be studied. Students have been prepared, have responded and examined those responses, and now should be ready and eager to move into studying the music more closely.

The process of responding through writing and talking is a valuable one; it encourages students to pay close attention to detail, it promotes reflection and thinking, and it introduces the idea that writing can be used for learning as well as for testing. Donald Murray, Pulitzer prize-winning author, suggests that "Many times we write just to find out what it all means, for by writing we can stand back from ourselves and see significance in what is close to us."[1] The process can be repeated frequently throughout a course, sometimes with a bit of structure as outlined above, other times simply as a time to free write about what is happening during and immediately after the listening or playing experience.

This process is also an easy method for introducing the role that journal writing can play. Ken Macrorie describes the potential of the journal this way: "...a place to try, experiment, test one's wings. For the moment, judgment, criticism, evaluation are suspended; what matters is the attempt, not the success of the attempt. In a journal one practices

the lines before going onstage."[2] So, just as writers keep journals to jot down ideas and observations as they occur, musicians should develop the habit of using journals for capturing responses to music heard, first attempts at composing, etc.

The kind of writing called for in the listening activity can be recorded in journals, or learning logs, and if frequent short periods of class time are devoted to such writing, then a good exercise once or twice during a marking period is to have students review their entries and then write a longer entry in which they either try to trace some theme that runs through their journal material or chart their progress and explain what they have discovered about themselves as listeners as well as musicians. Reading these "summary" or interpretative entries can be a helpful way for teachers to gain insight into their students' progress as readers, writers, listeners, and musicians.

Although such classroom activities may seem to take time away from practicing or studying music, in effect, such experiences tend to heighten students' awareness of music while providing them with a means for expressing their response in more than one way. Sharing responses also helps to stimulate student interaction and build a better understanding of audience reaction.

In music theory or appreciation courses, students must cope with extremely high levels of comprehension and frequently it is students' inability to adjust to the demands of the reading material, rather than their musicality or intelligence, which dictates success or failure. Frank Tirro, a noted music educator, stresses the problems students may face with certain textbooks: "A music theory textbook is almost in a class unto itself. Each word of explanation, each note or other symbol on the musical

staff, must be carefully considered, tasted, swallowed, and rechewed like a cow's cud. One does not really read a theory book. One grapples with it in a life-and-death struggle."[3] When teachers in any content field require a reading assignment, they frequently discover that students don't read the assigned material. The problem, however, is not that students cannot read but that, as Richard Vacca points out, "Most choose not to, primarily because they have never been shown how to explore and interpret text effectively."[4] For this reason, time spent in introducing students to techniques for handling reading material will result in improved student attitudes and comprehension.

Early in the year, a music teacher should spend extra time preparing any lesson involving reading. One excellent planning approach is the directed reading lesson (DRL).[5] The Directed Reading Lesson may contain a number of steps, but the basic planning approach calls for three general areas to be considered. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Stages of a DRL

Lesson Sequence	Rationale
Pre-reading	Promotes readiness; establishes connection for readers between what they already know and what they will come to know; sets a purpose for reading
Prompted Reading	Focuses reader's attention during the reading; defeats passive reading; fosters reader response
Post-reading	Provides reinforcement of comprehension; encourages readers to extend their knowledge beyond the text; promotes synthesis and application

The following DRL plan, designed to prepare students for a reading/discussion lesson on the meaning of "syncopation," and its significance in jazz, illustrates the different stages in the lesson and the high degree of student involvement which it fosters.

Pre-reading

Provide students with the following worksheet (Figure 2); ask them to fill in the worksheet as they listen to two excerpts which you will not identify for them (a Sousa Piece such as the "Manhattan Beach March" and a jazz piece such as Paul Desmond's "Take Five" work well). Encourage students to be as specific as possible in their notes. Play the first excerpt and have students record their impressions in Column 1; then, without discussion, play the second jazz excerpt and have students record their impressions in Column 2.

Figure 2

Listening Imagery

	Excerpt 1 Notes	Excerpt 2 Notes
What kind of people might be involved in this music? Consider size, age, sex, race, posture, etc.		
What kind of actions do you imagine happening where this music is being played?		
In what kind of a setting or environment do you imagine this music being played?		

Once students have recorded their impressions for both pieces (the journal works well here), have students share orally some of their written

responses. You may want to reconstruct the chart on the blackboard or an overhead transparency and jot down their comments during the discussion. It should not take students long to discover that the two types of music stimulated quite different impressions and some students will volunteer that the first excerpt was definitely a march and that the second was jazz or "club music." Ask students to pinpoint some of the specifics from their notes which help them make this distinction.

Prompted Reading

At this point in the lesson, students have formed some preliminary judgments about the difference between jazz and other music; to test and refine their judgments, they next can move to reading about jazz and the role which syncopation plays in that form of music. Instead of asking students just to start reading, however, provide some guide questions that will assist students in becoming directly involved with the text rather than passively reading it. For example, here is a passage about syncopation which appears in William Austin's MUSIC IN THE 20TH CENTURY.[6] Such passages are easily located and serve as valuable reading and thinking exercises. Reading of this sample passage could occur in or out of class. Students receive "prompt" questions like the ones below before reading the text:

1. What sentence in the reading provides a clear definition of the word "syncopation" for you?
2. What characteristics from your listening guide can you match with the characteristics of "syncopation" in the reading?
3. Why does the author use body movements to explain the difference between a march and a jazz piece?

The word "syncopation" is associated with jazz by many listeners ignorant of its meaning in any other context. They use the word to refer to the unequal subdivision of the beat into long and short notes, even if every beat is accented and every accent falls on a beat. In the usage of traditional music theory this is not syncopation: syncopation means only the unexpected accent and the absence of expected accent. Jazz involves this kind of syncopation too, as we have seen, but the naive use of the term points to the important fact that jazz combines syncopation with the unequal subdivisions of the beat. Syncopation alone, in the narrower sense of the word, is not enough to make jazz. The combination, obscured by the notation, is what makes the rhythm of jazz so elusive for performers who have not absorbed the tradition by ear. (The uneven subdivisions might possibly be regarded as syncopation, in the classical sense, against a theoretical, unheard, regular subdivision of the beat. But only in late developments of jazz, where very fast melodic motion is used in very slow tempo, are such theoretical subdivisions imagined by the musicians.)

The rhythm of jazz fits a style of bodily movement--not only of dancing but of walking--characteristic of many American Negroes. The shift of weight from one leg to the other is obvious, decisive, heavy like the beat of jazz. The weight rests securely on one leg and then on the other, rather than bouncing as in a march or gliding as in a waltz. Hardly ever do the two legs share the weight, as in marching or waltzing they often do and still more often appear to do. While one leg carries the weight, the other hangs loose, free to tap or shake before the next shift. Likewise the arms are loose, and the torso itself is flexible, as if sitting comfortably on the hips, rather than suspended from the chest as in the classic positions of ballet and military drill. The utter relaxation of many muscles corresponds to the freedom of melodic motion subdividing the

beat. To the syncopations correspond all sorts of shrugs, flicks, and twists of the body that seem independent of the main shifts of weight. Anyone whose ideal of movement is exemplified in march and waltz is likely to see and hear the jazz movement as a shiftless slouching and shuffling or as sexually provocative and repulsive. On the other hand, anyone who finds the tense, straight torso of march and waltz an uncomfortable affectation is likely to welcome the jazz movement as simply natural and true. To alternate between the two is difficult. To compromise between them is to lose the sense of both, but this is what much popular music does, swinging just enough to titillate a decorous lady without insulting her, and syncopating just enough to send a teen-age group into ecstasy without straining the intelligence. Whether jazz expresses moods of cheerful vivacity or naked pain and hunger, whether it symbolizes compliance with mechanical routine or impulsive, anarchical protest, its characteristic gesture distinguishes it from other styles that may be used to express or symbolize the same moods and attitudes.

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Post-reading

Once students have completed the reading, invite them to respond to what they have read; initially the discussion in this case would begin with the three prompt questions. From students' answers to these, the teacher quickly can determine comprehension and also enlarge the discussion to have students compare and contrast their understanding of syncopation with what they may already know about other aspects of music; this is also the point where students should be encouraged to return to their pre-reading notes and to refine their early impressions, discussing to what extent the reading supported their initial impressions and to what extent it contradicted them.

Although students may have read and comprehended the basic concept of syncopation, the real test of their understanding comes from their ability to apply what they have learned. In this case, several possible extension activities, depending upon the level and type of class, can be selected to increase their learning:

a. Students in a music appreciation class might be asked to find two other pieces which reflect a similar kind of contrast to the two excerpts which started the lesson and to bring them to class for demonstration and discussion.

b. Students in a music composition class might be asked to compose a short piece which clearly shows their understanding of syncopation.

c. Students in a performance class might be asked to select one or two short pieces which they might perform on their instruments to demonstrate their understanding of syncopation.

Not every lesson has to follow this pattern, but the DRL offers a structure that promotes active reading and retention and if students become familiar with its format, they will soon find themselves looking forward to reading assignments which invite them to test their own perceptions and discoveries aginst the information they find in their reading. The results of integrating reading, writing, and thinking skills into the music class should be more thoughtful and better informed musicians/readers, and further evidence to students that the skills of reading, writing, and thinking are naturally a part of the learning process in all aspects of the curriculum.

Notes

1 Donald Murray. Write to Learn (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 4.

2 Ken Macrorie. Writing to Be Read 2nd ed. (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1976), 151.

3 Frank Tino, "Reading Techniques in the Teaching of Music," in H. Alan Robinson and Ellen Lama Thomas, eds., Fusing Reading Skills and Content (Newark, Delaware: The International Reading Association, 1969), 103.

4 Richard T. Vacca. Content Area Reading. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981), 3.

5 Betty D. Roe, Barbara D. Stoodt, and Paul Burns. Secondary School Reading Instruction: The Content Areas, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 339-343.

6 William W. Austin. Music in the 20th Century (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1966), 187-189. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Abstract

Integrating Reading, Writing and Thinking Skills Into the Music Class

Music education is uniquely suited for reinforcing several basic skills which are part of the overall reading and writing processes of students. These skills include freedom of expression and the fluency of ideas; identifying a composer's purpose and message; and reasoning and comprehension. Sample activities suggest ways to reinforce the skills.